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ABSTRACT

Legends can be incorporated into elementary social studies curricula to help students understand how people transmitted history and culture from one generation to another before they learned to read and write. Taga the Great is a legend which helps explain the 16-feet high latte stones on the Mariana Islands, Tinian and Rota. According to legend, Taga was born on the island of Guam. Already in childhood, he exhibited supernatural powers such as the ability to uproot large trees and leap from one Pacific island to another. When Taga grew up and became chief of Rota, he engaged in and won numerous contests of wit and strength with other chiefs. Taga's fame spread throughout the Mariana islands and caused him to be the envy of all people, including his own children. To build a house great enough to please him, Taga quarried and carved very big stones and formed large pillars which he covered with wood and thatch. The house was very fine and admired by all who saw it. Taga's downfall began, however, as soon as his house was completed. His pride in his own superior strength prompted him to murder his little son, and his other children died soon afterwards out of remorse. As each child died, a pillar of Taga's home fell down. Soon only one pillar remained as a witness to Taga's glory. From the legend of Taga, students can gain insight into human strengths and weaknesses as well as into how the big latte stones of Rota and Tinian came into existence. (DB)

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by

FRANCES S. BAKER

MARIANA DISTRICT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

1973

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Legends of Guam — Compiled by the staff of the Guam Museum
Marianas Prehistory — Alexander Spoehr
Legends of Micronesia — Eve Grey
Personal Notes of Jim Moses, Peace Corps Volunteer on Tinian.
Conversations with citizens of Rota, Tinian, and Saipan.

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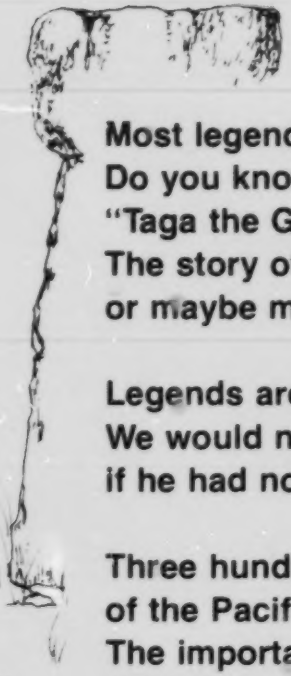
THE TAGA LEGENDS



Most legends are very old.
Do you know about legends?
"Taga the Great" is a legend.
The story of Taga is over 300 years old,
or maybe more.

Legends are important because they tell us about history.
We would not know about Taga
if he had not become a legend.

Three hundred years ago the people
of the Pacific Islands couldn't write.
The important things that happened were put
into dances, songs, chants, and stories.
This is how the children learned the stories.
When they grew up,
they told these stories to their children.

So the stories were saved for hundreds of years.
But each storyteller told the stories a little differently.
Each storyteller made Taga a little stronger and a little taller.
Today, the storytellers say that Taga was ten feet tall!
Do you think he was really that big?

This story of Taga tells about the big latte stones on Rota and Tinian.
Parts of the story are facts scientists have found to be true.
Parts of the story are the old, old legend of Taga.

How can we tell what is true
and what is just a good story?
Most legends were once true.
They were just made into bigger stories.
We need to say, "Taga was a very big, strong man.
But ten feet is too tall.
Perhaps he was between six and seven feet tall."

Or we can say, "Yonanai took all the thatch off his house by himself.
He was very strong.
But perhaps a wind blew part of the thatch over to Agiguan."

We must be careful what we decide is true,
and what is a little larger than life.

We might say, "Oh, who could make latte stones sixteen feet high?
That is too big.
Maybe they were eight feet high."
But if you go to Tinian and measure the stones,
they really are sixteen feet high!

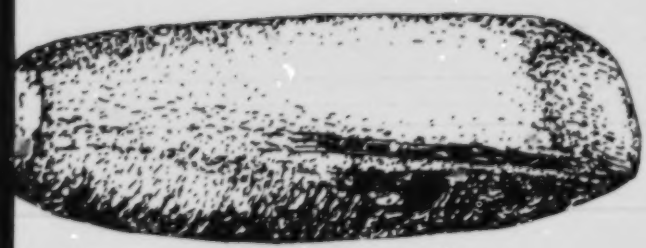
So you can see it is important to remember stories just as they are told to you.
We find that each storyteller changes the story a little.
Today we find many stories that sound alike.
The story about Taga and his father is probably the same story
as the one about Taga and his little boy.

One story says Taga was born on Tinian.
Another story says he was born on Guam.
One story says Taga had a canoe contest with his brother.
Another story says it was with the chief of Tinian.

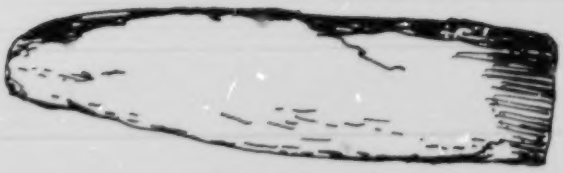
Scientists think that perhaps Taga was not just one man, but several men.
Perhaps he was a grandfather, a father, and a son.
Or perhaps he was two brothers.
Or perhaps the storytellers remembered other stories about strong men,
and they told them all about Taga.

Before the Spaniards came to the Mariana Islands, there were many people here.
There were many villages on Guam, Rota, Tinian, and Saipan.
Many people lived in the Northern Islands.
The story of Taga the Great can help us understand
the people who made the first part of our history.

Shell Adze
actual size



Stone Adze
actual size



Shell Gouge
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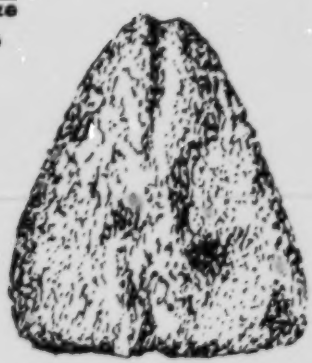

Stone Sinkers
actual size

Slingstones
actual size

Mortar and Pestle
2½ to 3 feet wide

SOME UTENSILS USED BY THE ANCIENT CHAMORROS

SOUTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

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TAGA THE GREAT

This is the story of Taga the Great.
It is not the only story about him.
Maybe your grandmother knows another story about Taga.

It happened so long ago that there are many stories about Taga.
There are stories of Taga in Guam.
There are stories of Taga in Rota.
But most of the stories about Taga are from Tinian.

Taga's father was the biggest,
strongest man on Guam.

Everybody said,
"How strong he is!
He is the strongest
man in the world!"

Taga's father was very proud.

When Taga was born, his father was very happy.
"See my fine big son!" he said.
Everybody said, "What a big boy!
Soon he will be bigger than you!"

When Taga was three years old, he had very big muscles.
Taga's father began to worry.
One night he was walking on the beach, worrying.
He saw Taga lying on the ground.
He was holding a burning torch in one hand.
His other hand was in a big hole under a tree.

"*Hafa adai,* Father," said Taga.
"I'm hunting crabs.
This crab is under the tree.
But I'll get him!"
Then he stood up.
He grabbed the tree and pulled it up like a weed!

Taga's father was frightened and angry.
"What can I do?" he thought.
"Taga is stronger than I am, and he is only three years old!"

"You are much too strong!" Taga's father shouted.
So he ran after Taga.
Taga ran to the north of Guam.
He came to a high cliff with the ocean below.
"I'll catch you!" shouted his father.

Taga made a great leap!
He jumped so far that he landed on Rota.
You can still see his footprint in the rock at Puntan Patgon.

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Some people say Taga became the chief of Rota.
When he grew up, he decided to build a house.
"I am a very young man.
But I am the strongest man on this island!" said Taga.
"I will build a very big house.
It will be bigger than my father's house or my uncle's house.
It will be bigger than *anybody's* house.
I will have the biggest house in the Mariana Islands!"

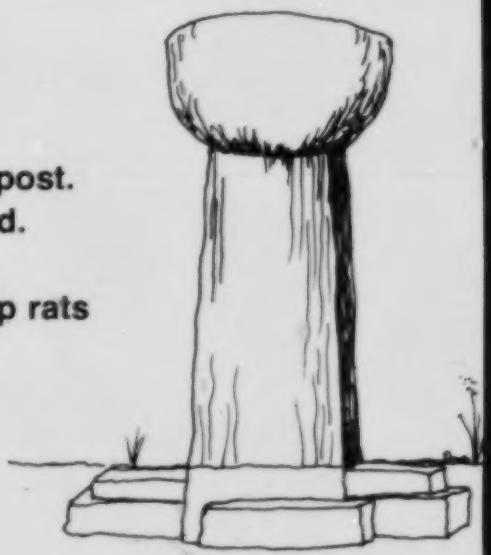
So he went to the north side of Rota.
On a flat plain he found some rock.
From this rock, he began to carve very big stones.

THIS PICTURE SHOWS ONE SHAFT AND ONE CAPSTONE AT THE NIEVES QUARRY ON ROTA.

The legends say Taga carved the latte stones all by himself,
though scientists say many people worked on them.

These scientists think that perhaps fire was used to soften the stone.
The stones were carved in the ground.
Then they were lifted out of the ground
and taken to the village.

A hole was dug in the ground.
The stone shaft was put into the ground like a post.
Other big stones were put beside it and covered.
Large capstones were put on top.
Scientists believe that the capstone was to keep rats
from getting into the house.



THIS PICTURE SHOWS THE ONLY STONE LIFTED FROM THE GROUND AT THE NIEVES QUARRY ON ROTA. YOU CAN SEE SEVERAL OTHER STONES.

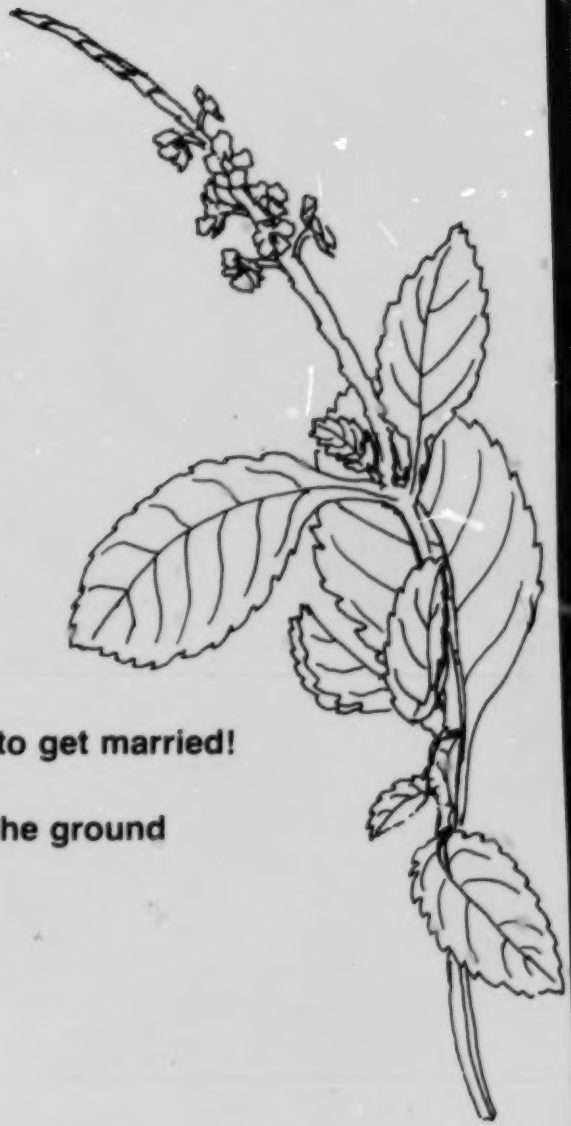
Taga was working very hard on his house.
He made nine long shafts of stone.
He made seven round capstones.

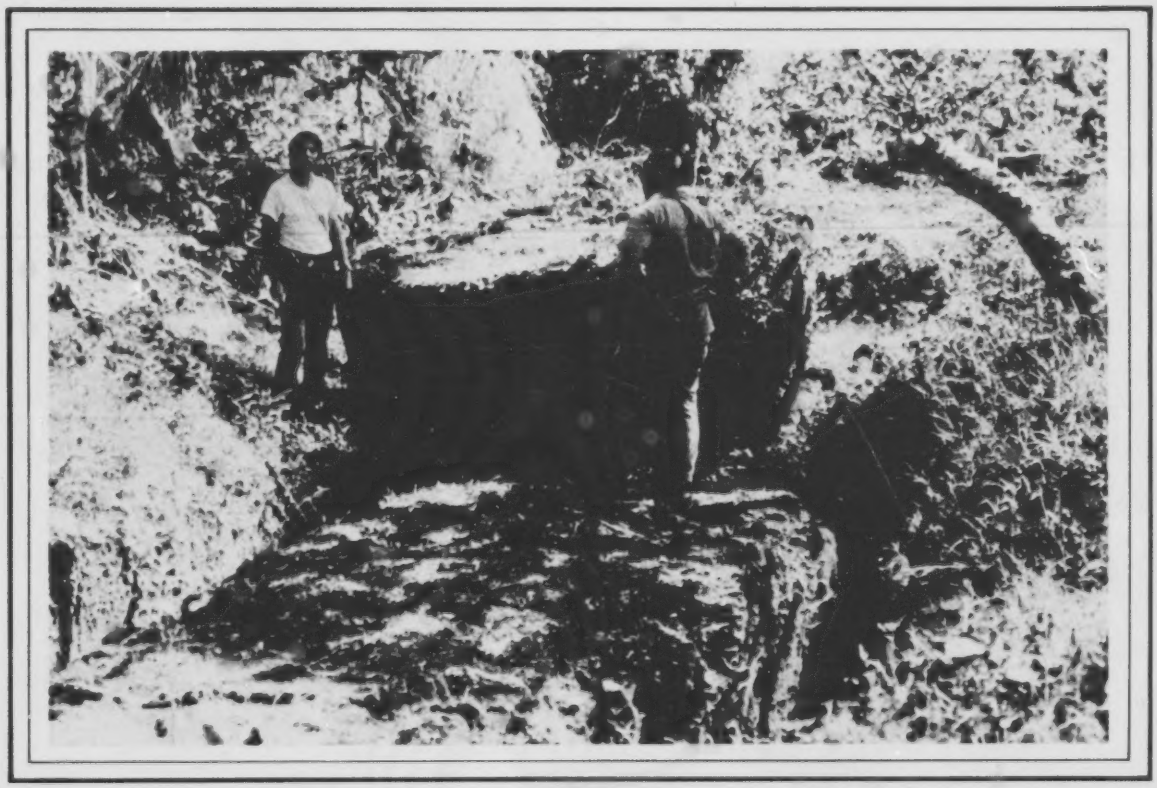
He lifted one capstone out of the ground.

Then something happened.
We don't know what happened.
Taga stopped working.

Maybe Rota went to war.
Maybe Taga saw a beautiful girl and decided to get married!

If you go to Rota, you can see the stones in the ground
just where Taga left them!





THIS PICTURE SHOWS THE ONLY STONE LIFTED FROM THE GROUND AT THE NIEVES ON ROTA. YOU CAN SEE SEVERAL OTHER STONES.

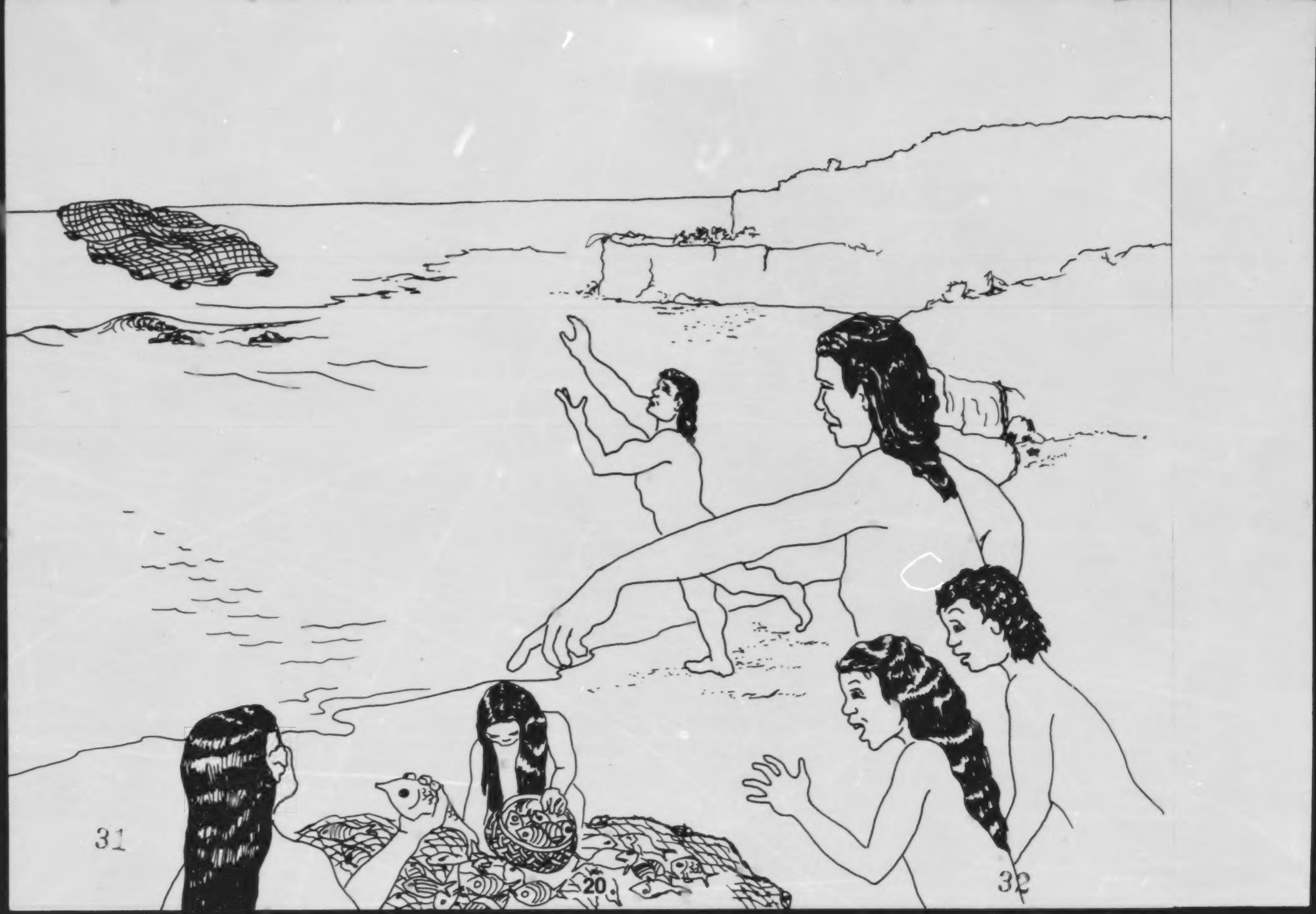
27

Taga was married in Rota.
His wife had a baby girl.

Taga decided to go to Tinian.
He got into his big canoe.
He took his wife and baby with him.
It didn't take long to get to Tinian, because he paddled very fast.

The chief of Tinian was there to meet Taga.
He knew Taga was a very strong man.
The Tinian chief didn't want to fight Taga.

"Taga," said the chief, "let's have a contest."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"Fine',, said Taga.
The two chiefs took their nets.
The Tinian chief threw his net near the shore.
When he pulled his net in, it was full of small fish.

Taga was worried.
He didn't know a good place to fish.
So he stood on the shore.
He threw his net way out over the reef.

Then he jumped into the ocean to pull in his net.
His net was full of big ocean fish.

"You win this time," said the Tinian chief.

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"I'm hungry," said Taga.
"Let's cook our fish."
"We need some coconut milk to put on the fish," said the Tinian chief.
He climbed a coconut tree
and threw down some coconuts.

Taga laughed, "That isn't the way!"
He stood on the ground and shook the tree.
All the coconuts, even the smallest ones, fell off the tree.

The Tinian chief was surprised and worried.
But all he said was, "We need to husk and grate the coconuts."
So the chief husked some coconuts and broke them open.
Then he gave them to his wife to grate.

"That isn't the way!" laughed Taga.

He picked up a coconut.
He tore off the husk with his hands.
Then he crushed the nut between his two hands.
The milk ran out.

Taga had won three contests.

The Tinian chief was so ashamed that
he went away.

This is how Taga became the chief of Tinian.

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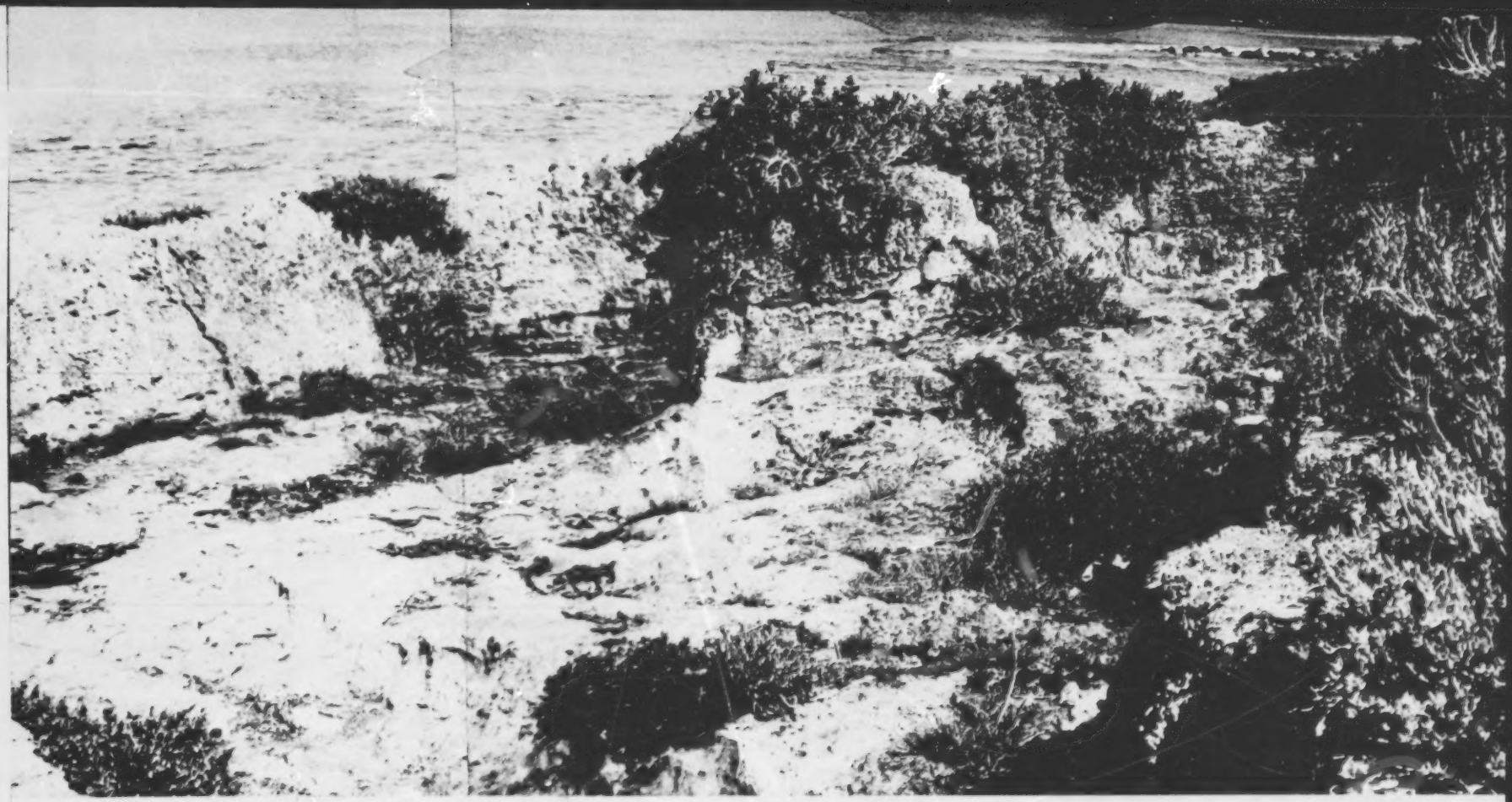
Taga decided it was time to build his big house.
He had many servants.
And a large army.

He found a good beach to build his village.
Not far away he found the rock he needed.
It was just south of the village, near a tiny beach.

This time Taga didn't make the stones as big as on Rota.
But they were still bigger than other latte stones.

Taga carved the big stones.
He picked them up and carried them to the village
all by himself.



THIS IS PART OF THE QUARRY WHERE THE LATTE STONES WERE MADE. CAN YOU FIND WHERE TWO SHAFTS AND A CAPSTONE CAME FROM? THERE ARE MANY OTHER HOLES NEAR THIS PLACE. TAGA'S HOUSE IS BY THE ARROW. YOU CAN SEE IT IS NOT FAR AWAY BY BOAT.

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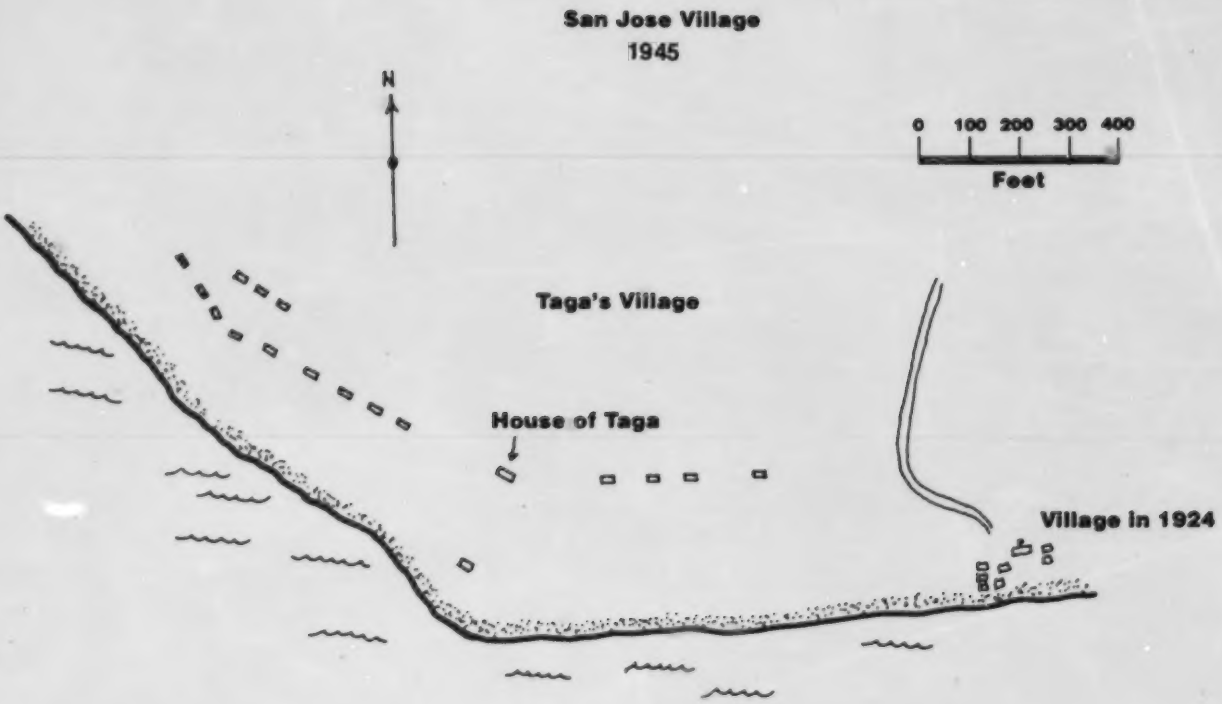
The people of Tinian made many latte stones.
There were 18 houses with latte stones in Taga's village alone.

Many of the stones were carved near the tiny beach.
The water is deep enough for good swimming and boating.
You can dive off the small cliff into the water.

Scientists think that people carved the stones.
They tied the big stones to a raft or canoe.
This made it easy to take them to the village beach.



This map was made by Hornbostle in 1924.
Taga's village had 18 houses along the beach.
Today the beach is covered by the dock.

Here is a map of Taga's village.
A scientist named Hornbostle made the map.

He found the latte stones of 18 houses.
He drew a map of them in 1924. How long ago was that?

Soon after that the Japanese made a village there.
All the latte stones were moved or bulldozed.
But Taga's big house was saved.
The Japanese made a pretty little park around the stones.
You can still see it today.

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Other people had seen the village before Hornbostle came.

Lord Anson came to Tinian in 1742.
This is a sketch of Taga's house, as Anson saw it.
No one lived on Tinian then.
The Spaniards had taken all of the people to Guam.

The wooden part of Taga's house is gone.
But you can see all the stones which were standing.

In 1818 Freycinet came to the Marianas.
He saw seven of the stones still standing.
Other people came in 1865 and saw seven standing stones.
Five stones were standing in 1900.

TAGA'S HOUSE, AS LORD ANSON SAW IT IN 1742

When Hornbostle was there he saw two standing stones.

If you go to Tinian today, you will see only one standing stone.

The Tinian people tell this story.

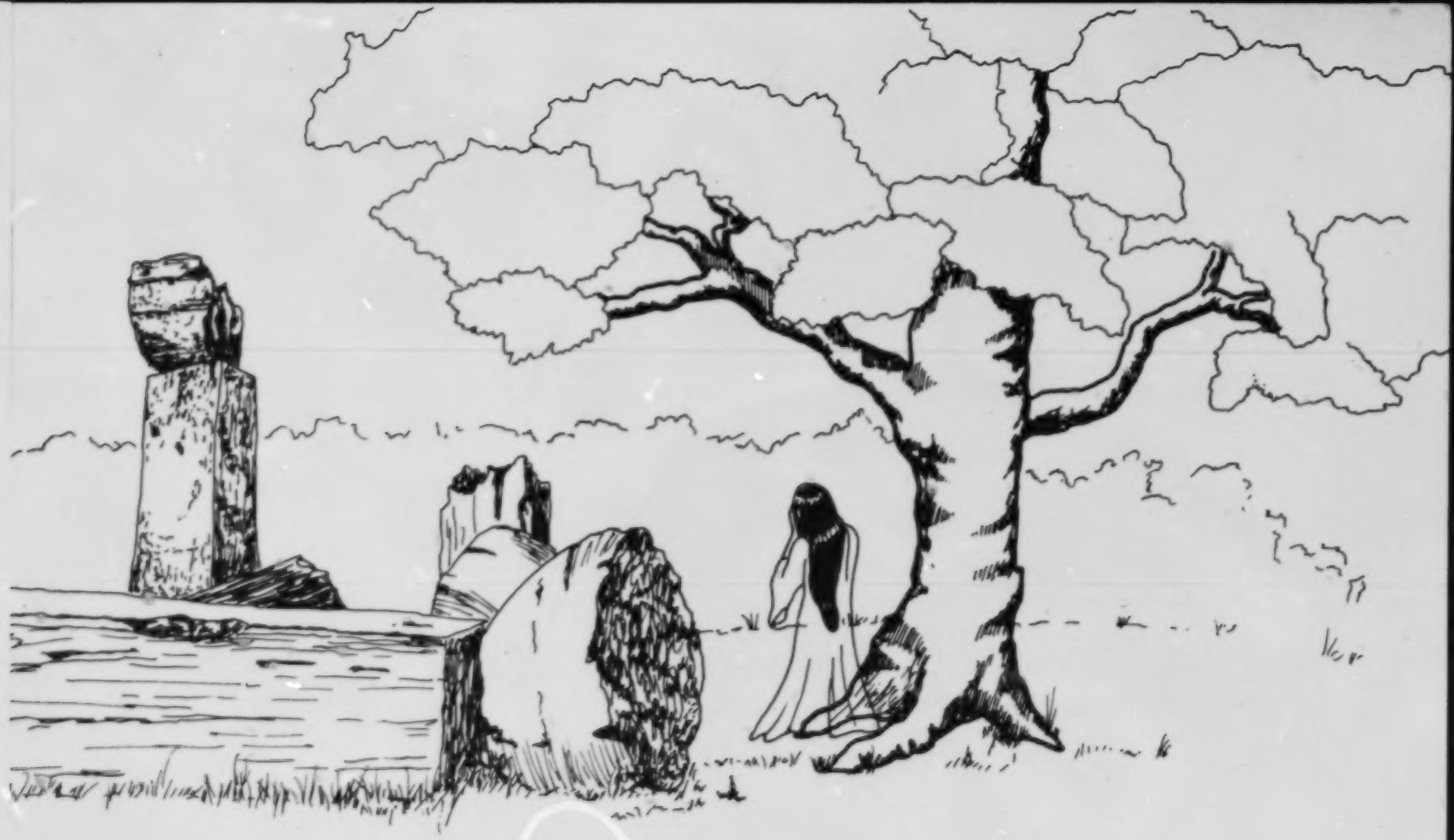
Taga had twelve children, one for each latte stone.
When his children died, they became ghosts.
Each stayed near his latte stone.
When his latte stone fell, the ghost went away.

One by one the stones fell and Taga's children's ghosts went away.

Today there is only one ghost.
It is Taga's daughter.

She is sad and lonely.
People see her walking in the trees near Taga's house.

When the last stone falls,
Taga's daughter's ghost will go away, too.



TODAY THERE IS ONLY ONE GHOST — TAGA'S DAUGHTER.

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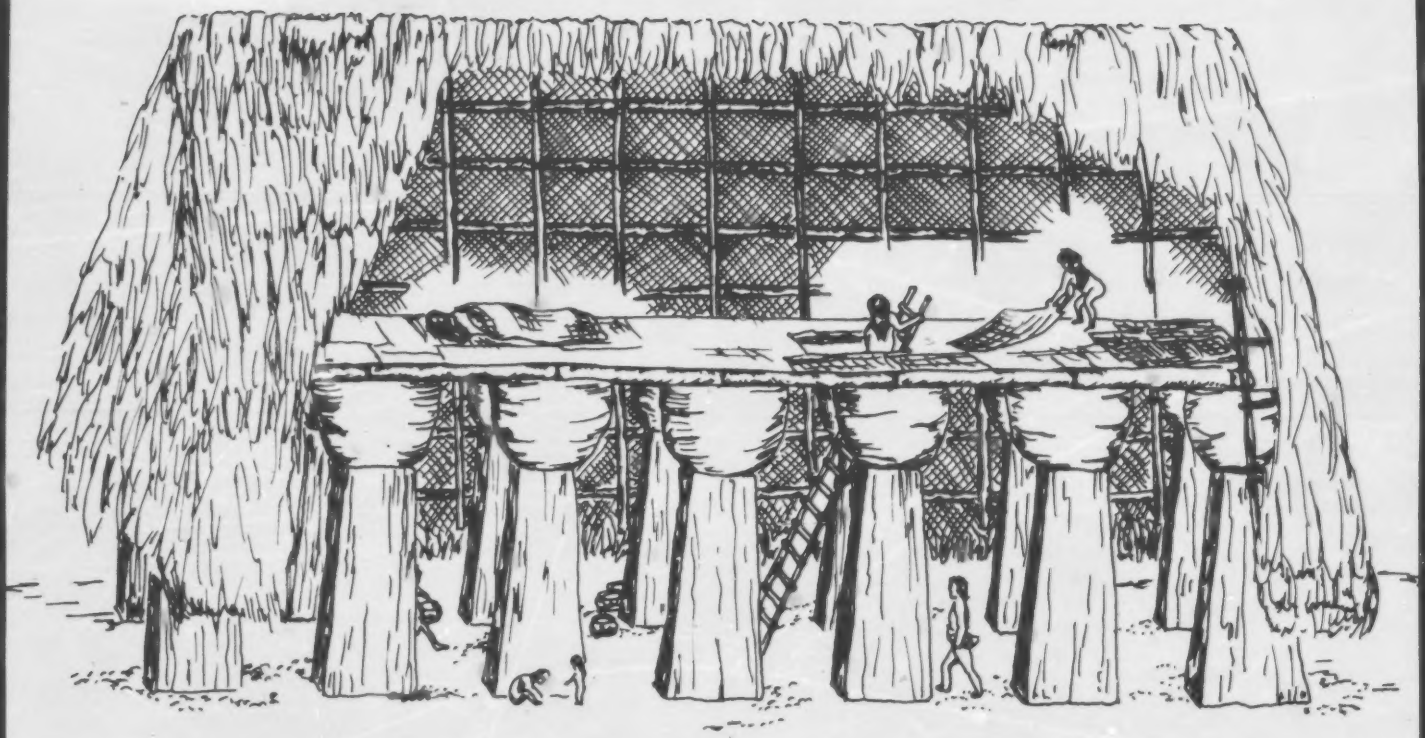
Taga was very busy.
He cut all the long stones
and all the cap stones.
He carried them from the cliff to his house.

He cut the big logs for the floor.
He cut tall trees for the roof beams.

He made a lot of coconut rope
to tie the beams of his house together.

He thatched the roof with nipa palm leaves.

It was a very big house.
It was the biggest house in the Marianas.



Perhaps Taga's house looked like this. Mats were used on the floor upstairs. Mats may have divided the big house into rooms. Smooth beach pebbles were used on the ground. Canoes were made and stored on the ground floor. Cooking was probably done in a cooking shed nearby.

Taga was proud of his house.
He was proud of his fine baby daughter.
He was proud of his good wife.
His wife was going to have another baby.

He was proud of his new village.
He was proud of his soldiers and servants.

Mostly he was proud of his own strong body.
"How strong I am! I am the strongest man alive!" said Taga.

Maybe he was too proud.

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"I am very, very strong," thought Taga.
"No one on Tinian will fight with me.
My house is finished.
I am bored. What can I do now?"

"We could go visit our relatives on Rota," said his wife.

"No, they should come here," said Taga.
"I want my brother to see my house."

"Send someone to invite them to come," said his wife.
"We will have a big feast."

"All right," said Taga. "But I am still bored!"

"Ai-adai," thought his wife.
"He is going to do something foolish."

"I know!" said Taga. "Get ready.
We are going on a trip. It will be lots of fun!"

"Where are we going?" asked his wife.

"We'll go to Saipan. I have not been to Saipan.
I can find plenty of people to fight with!
I might even start a war!
Hurry up! Get ready!"

"Ai-adai!" thought his wife.
But she got ready to go to Saipan.

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Saipan was not far away.
Taga took his wife and a few men.

They rowed across the channel in the dark.
Taga wanted to surprise the Saipanese.

They landed quietly at Ladder Beach
and hid the canoe.
They went into a cave to sleep until daylight.

Taga was happy.
He slept very well,
and snored loudly.
He didn't wake up until the sun came up.

THEY LANDED QUIETLY AT LADDER BEACH. THEY WENT INTO A CAVE TO SLEEP.

"Wake up, everybody!" Taga shouted.
"I am going to fight ten Saipanese today!
Get up, wife. I need some food."

But his wife didn't get up.

"Are you sick?" Taga asked.

"No, I'm not sick. I'm fine! Look!"

Taga looked at his wife.
"Why do you have two heads?" he said.

"I don't have two heads. This is your new son!"

"My son!" cried Taga. "Look, everybody!
My son was born last night!"

It was a beautiful new baby. Everyone was happy.

"We will call him Yonanai," said Taga.
"Now we must go home. I can't fight today.
I was sleeping in the same cave where the baby was born.
I would not be strong enough to fight."

So they put the canoe back in the water and
sailed back to Tinian.
They went back to their village and the big house.

Taga never went to Saipan again.

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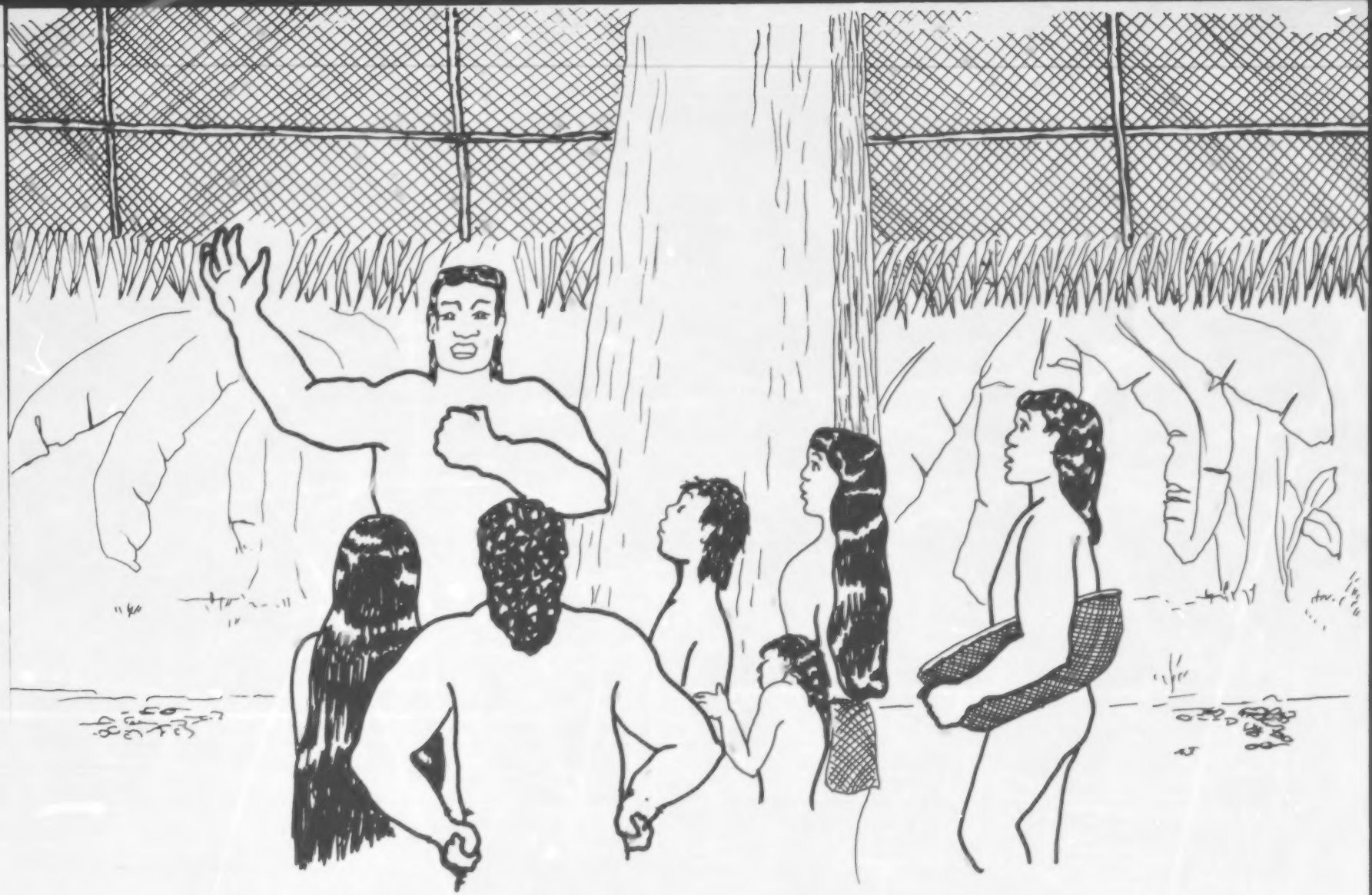
Soon Taga's relatives came to visit.

They saw the new house,
and the new village
and the new baby.

They listened to Taga boasting about everything.
Taga said to his relatives, "I am strong!
You can see how strong I am!
Look at my house! Look at my village of warriors!
Look at my servants! Look at my big muscles!"

Taga's brother got very tired of Taga's boasting.



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"You talk too much," said Taga's brother.
"Let's have a contest."

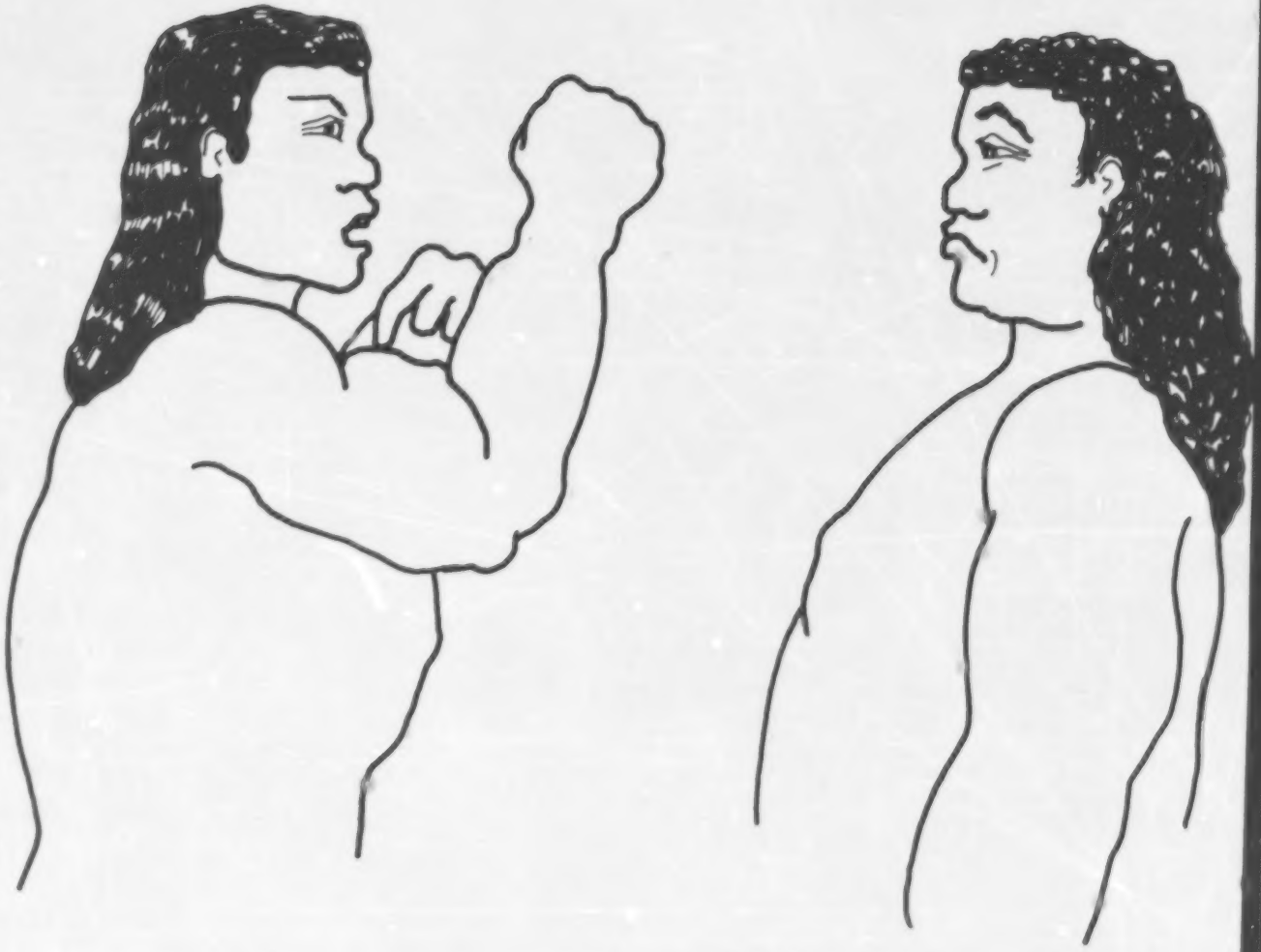
"Yes!" said Taga. "But I can tell you now.
I am so strong I will win."

"We'll have a canoe race," said his brother.
His brother thought he could win.
He was a very good sailor and a good paddler, too.

"*Ai!*" said Taga. "I can make a canoe go faster than you can!"

"All right," said his brother, "let's use the same canoe."

"Fine," said Taga.



"We will go out into the ocean between Tinian and Rota.
I will paddle toward Tinian," said Taga.

"I will paddle toward Rota," said his brother.
"We will see which island we come to!"

They got into the canoe and began to paddle.
Soon they were half way between the two islands.
It was a long way. Tinian looked very small.
Rota also looked very small.

Taga sat in one end of the canoe looking toward Tinian.
His brother sat in the other end of the canoe.
He was looking at Rota.

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"GO!" shouted Taga.

They began to paddle. The water flew up.
They made big waves.
The canoe bounced up and down.

It didn't go toward Rota. And it didn't go toward Tinian.

Taga paddled harder and faster!
But Taga's brother paddled harder and faster, too.

They paddled all day. The sun went down.
Big waves from their paddles came to Tinian and Rota.
But the canoe didn't move.

"This is terrible," thought Taga to himself.
"I can't stand it, if my brother is stronger than I am!"
So he suddenly paddled very hard.

"Good!" thought his brother. "Taga is worried!"
And he started to paddle very hard.

Suddenly the brothers heard a noise! CRACK!
Taga shot toward Tinian.
His brother went toward Rota so fast he lost his paddle.
Then both brothers were swimming.

"Where is our canoe?" shouted Taga.

"I think we broke it!" said his brother.

They had to swim all the way back to Tinian.

After that Taga didn't boast so much.

82

83

Taga lived in his village for many years.
He had more children.
Yonanai grew up to be a fine strong boy.

When Yonanai became a man, he got married
and built a house.
It was not as big as his father's house.

One day Yonanai's wife said, "Our roof is leaking."

"We need new thatch," said Yonanai.

"I'll call the women to make new thatch," said his wife.
"You call the men to help take off the old thatch."

"Never mind," said Yonanai. "Call your women,
but I will take away the old thatch myself!"

As Taga came past,
he saw his son on the roof.
Yonanai was throwing pieces of his roof all over Tinian.

He threw some pieces all the way to Aguigan!
Do you think the goats on Aguigan ate Yonanai's roof?

Taga laughed.

"Yonanai is really strong!" he said to himself,
"But not as strong as I am."

Taga went home, very proud of himself.

AGUIGAN ISLAND, FROM TINIAN

Taga's youngest boy was five years old and
Taga was proud of him.
He was a very strong little boy.

One day he went swimming and
caught a crab.
"Tie a string to my crab, Father. I want to keep it."

Taga tied a string to the crab.
His little boy took it home to play with.

Taga laughed when he saw his little boy playing with the crab.

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Taga went into his big house.
Soon he heard his son calling him.
"Father, come out! Come help me!"

Taga looked out.

"See, the string broke! My crab ran under that tree.
Come push the tree over so I can get my crab!"

"No," said Taga. "I planted that coconut tree.
It's just beginning to have coconuts.
I don't want to push it over.
Go find another crab."

"No!" shouted the little boy. "I want this one!"

He put his arms around the tree,
pulled it out of the ground and
caught his crab.

Taga was surprised. Then he knew!
This little boy would soon be stronger than any man.

Taga was afraid.

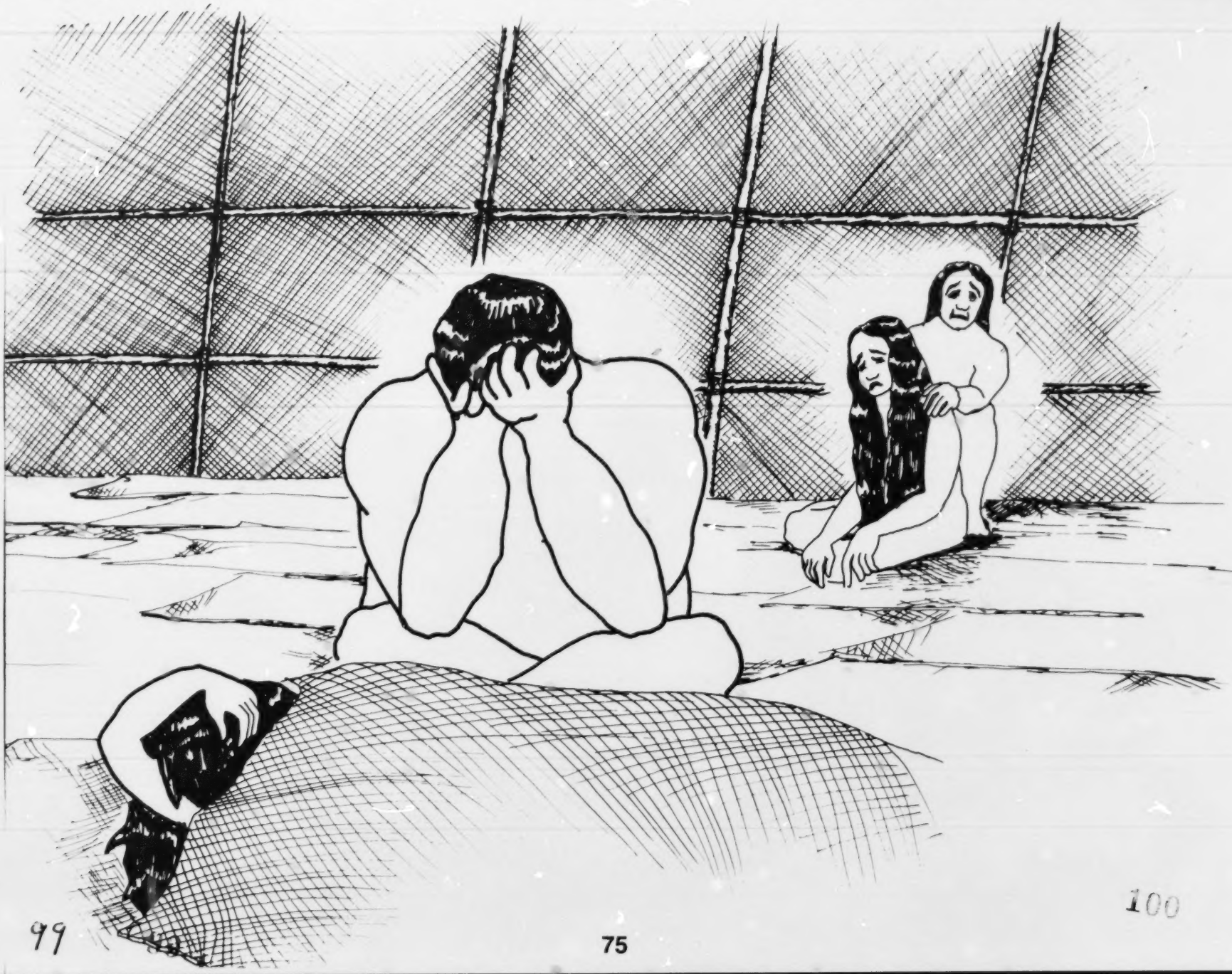
He ran out of his house,
caught his little boy, and killed him.

"What could I do?" he cried.
"He might have killed me some day."

All the people were afraid of Taga.
They always did what he told them.

But Taga was never happy again.

His good wife was very sad.
She was so sad she got very sick.
Before long, she died.



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Taga's beautiful daughter was afraid.
She was also very angry.

Her little brother was dead.
Her mother was dead.

There are two stories about what happened next.

One story says this:

> Taga's beautiful daughter ran away
> to hide in the mountains.
> After a while she died, but
> her lonely ghost came back to Taga's big house.
> People still see her there sometimes.

The other story says this:

Taga's beautiful daughter was afraid.
She decided she must kill her father.

She found his big spear
and killed him while he was sleeping.

Soon after she died.
But her ghost could not rest.
She has to pay for killing her father.
She has to wait until the last stone of her father's house falls down.

People of Tinian see her lonely ghost
walking and crying in the village at night.

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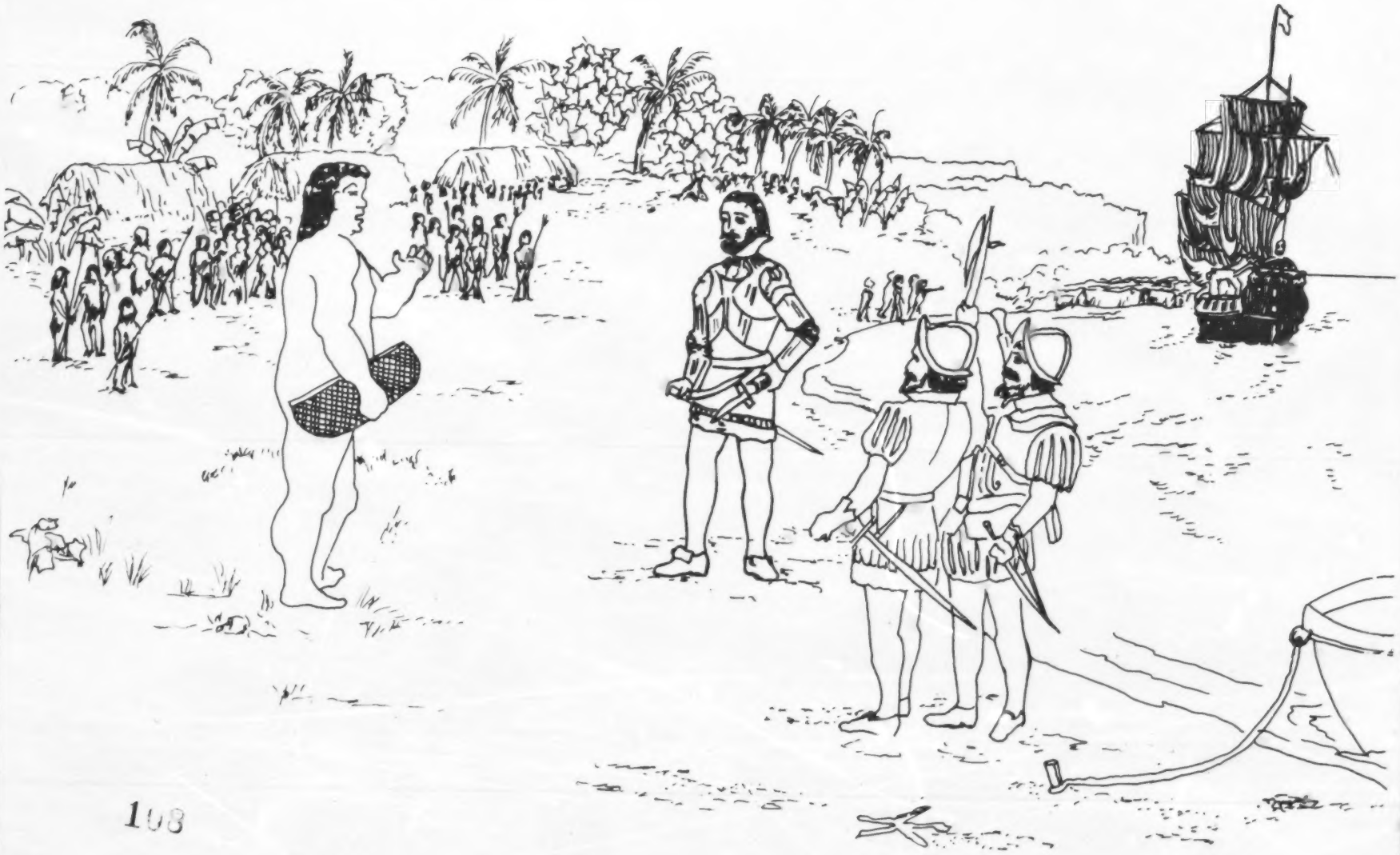
There are other legends about Taga.
This is a Spanish one.

When the first Spanish ship came to Tinian, Taga was there
He welcomed the Spaniards.
He was friendly and took them to his village.

When St. Joseph came to Tinian,
the people became Christian.

Taga became a Christian, too.
When he was an old man, he died on Tinian.



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This is a social studies reading book meant to accompany the fifth grade unit in the Marianas. This book is intended for students to use by themselves, or it can be used by the class as a whole, whichever the teacher decides. It can also be used at other grade levels, as deemed appropriate.

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